



Missing presumed lost

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From Alexander's tomb to Nazi gold, there's a hell of a lot of lost loot out there. With hard work and a lot of luck, you could have a share... By Adrian Furness

Supposing you've got nothing better to do this weekend, why don't you pop along down to Lincolnshire with your metal-detector and trusty dog and dig up a few fields? You'll probably find nothing other than the odd worm or two. But then again, you might just turn up bad King John's crown jewels.

At least, that's where they were last reported seen back in the 13th Century, when the border between Norfolk and

Lincolnshire was part of the Wash. Poor old King John, in his haste to cross the estuary, made the ill-advised crossing at the wrong time with the result that his entourage, and most of the nation's treasures were consigned to the swirling tides and the hungry quicksands. Adds a new dimension to the expression "lost in the wash"...

The land's been drained since then, so it's almost certain that the jewels are somewhere out there, nestling under an

innocuous turnip in the middle of some vast mediaeval meadow. OK, so it's been a while. But hell, diamonds and gold don't rust... they just go up in value.

And that's only the half of it. What with one thing and another, quite a few startling objects have gone missing over the centuries. Ships, buildings, even entire countries and civilizations have disappeared off, or under, the face of the Earth.

Read on for the *Focus* Top 20 Missing In Actions... ▶

Illustration by Gino D'Achille

Missing presumed lost

1 The Crystal skulls of wisdom

Native American legend tells of 13 life-size crystal skulls, used by the Aztecs and Mayans, which could speak and sing and knew the destiny of mankind. But they would tell their secrets only when re-united. In 1927, British explorer Frederick Mitchell-Hedges found a crystal skull under the altar of Mayan temple ruins excavated in the jungles of Belize. Other skulls have been discovered, and although some have now been exposed as fakes, that first one – the Skull of Doom – and three others remain unexplained. If four have been found, that leaves just nine missing skulls standing between man and the answer to life, the universe and everything.

2 The Bard's lost play

In 1598, university student Francis Meres listed *Love's Labours Won* as well as *Love's Labours Lost* among Shakespeare's comedies. Scholars thought this was either a mistake or an alternative title for *The Taming of the Shrew*, but in 1953 a fragment of a bookseller's list for 1603 turned up listing *The Shrew* along with both the *Love's Labours* titles. Shakespeare obviously realised *Love's Labours Lost* was crying out for sequel.

3 The Pyramids

Two are still missing: the pyramid of the pharaoh Menkaure – "The Pyramid which is Divine of Places" – and of Neferkare, famed in antiquity as "The Enduring and Living Pyramid". Both lie somewhere under the sands of Egypt. The last

5 The wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah

The exact whereabouts of the wicked cities of the plain consumed by fire and brimstone are unknown, but archaeologists say they're probably lurking somewhere under the waters of the southern Dead Sea.

6 Alexander's tomb

Somewhere under his own city of Alexandria lies Alexander the Great, whose urine, according to legend, smelt of violets. The 32-year-old world conqueror died in Babylon in 323 BC. After a year-long funeral procession he was laid to rest in a great mausoleum, the Sema, built by Ptolemy at the main crossroads in Alexandria.

In antiquity it was a major tourist attraction even though one of Ptolemy's hard-up successors melted down the gold sarcophagus and replaced it with glass. In the first century AD Emperor Augustus came to pay his respects and crowned Alexander's body with a gold diadem. But after that the mists of time close over the tomb, and by the 5th Century, visitors to the city are no longer mentioning it.

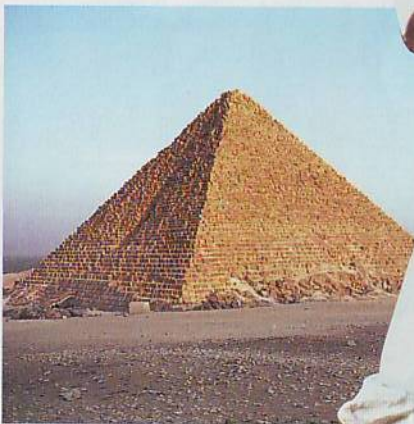
We know the Sema was in south east Alexandria, and in the 1850s there were claims that the body had been seen there beneath the al-Nabi Danyal mosque, and that ruins of the Ptolemaic tomb complex had been discovered.

7 The mystery of the Mercedes Silver Arrow

The most beautiful and sought-after of lost racing cars, was made in the 1930s on the direct orders of

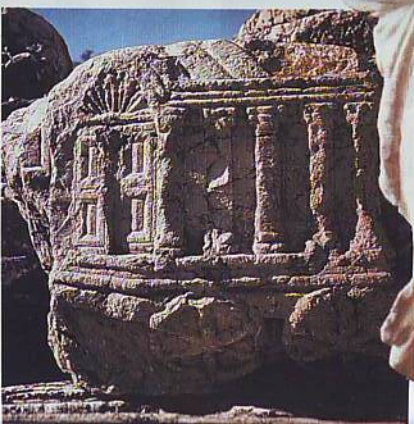


When all thirteen crystal skulls are reunited man's fate will be known

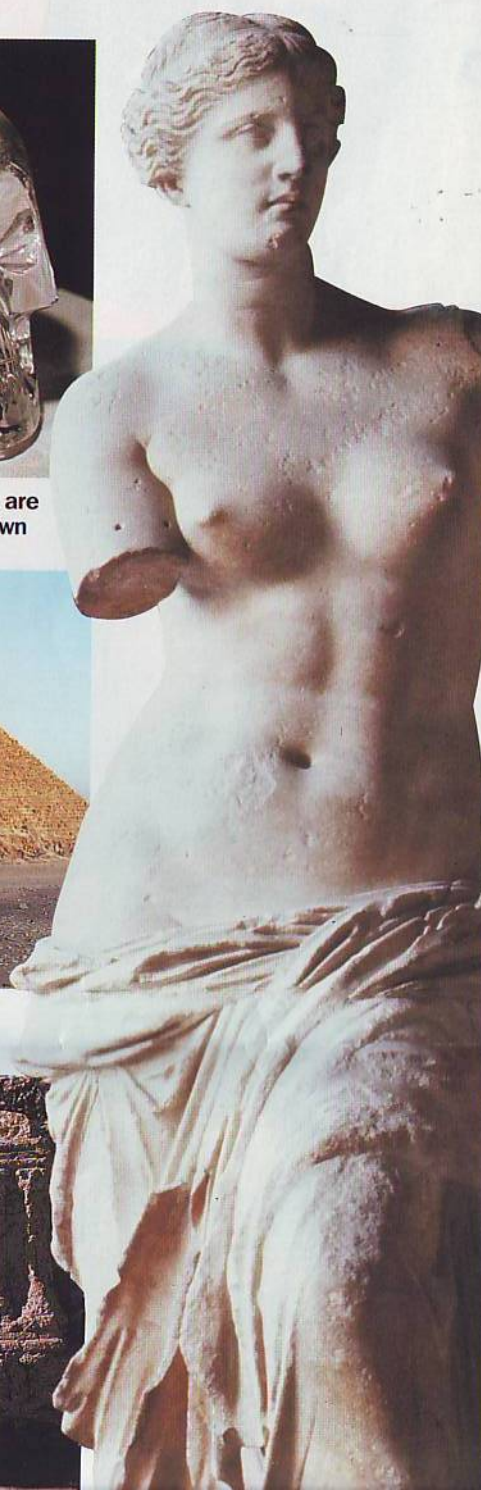


Architecture Collection (4)

Somewhere in the Egyptian sands lie two "new" pyramids



Ancient Art



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4 Another fine colourful mess

Among the many hundreds of lost films is Laurel and Hardy's 1930 Technicolor movie *Rogue Song*. It was their only appearance in a colour film. Missing British films include a dozen made by Michael Powell, as well as Errol Flynn's first British flick *Murder at Monte Carlo* (1935), Max Miller's comedy *Educated Evans* (1936) and Alfred Hitchcock's second movie *The Mountain Eagle*, a 1926 silent starring Nita Naldi – and perhaps no real loss since the great man himself dismissed it as “very bad”.

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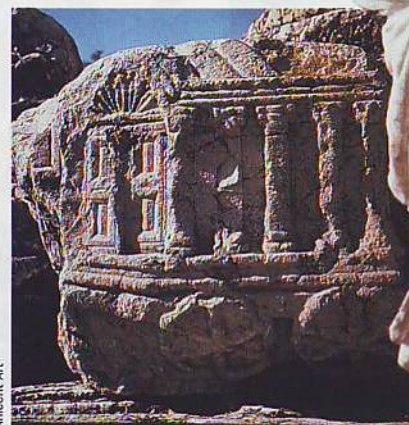
The most beautiful and sought-after of lost racing cars, was made in the 1930s on the direct orders of Hitler and went on to become the winner of a clutch of Grands Prix in the pre-war years. Along with other German national treasures the Silver Arrow was sent east as the Allies closed in on Berlin, eventually turning up in Romania. That's where British classic car enthusiast Terry Cohn discovered and bought it, in 1988, from the old Ceausescu regime. An asking price of \$2 million didn't prove an obstacle. “I paid for it – but then it disappeared again, probably spirited away by agents of the Romanian government,” says Cohn. “It has been sighted since and I think it's now probably either in Switzerland or Germany.” If it ever comes to light again the legendary car will be worth between £6m and £10m.

Architecture Collection (4)



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Ancient Art



Only the fictional Indiana Jones knows the secrets of the “lost” Ark

Gerry Cranham



Jockey Walter Swinburn on 1981 Derby winner Shergar



The luckless Silver Arrow has disappeared more than once

Quadrant Picture Library



Fleeing from Sodom: the fire and brimstone are now under water

AKG London



© BBC

8 The Missing Link

As discussed in previous issues of *Focus*, the one fossil that would be half way between ape and man has yet to be discovered. Evolution, it seems, ain't quite so neat.

9 The destruction of the Library of Alexandria

Another mystery from Alexander's capital is what became of the 70,000 books in antiquity's greatest library. Almost every work known to the classical world was collected during the six centuries between the Library's foundation around 300 BC and its destruction in civil unrest in the late 3rd Century. The bibliography – also now lost – survived into the Byzantine era as the standard reference for all Greek literature. Obviously many other books survived for centuries since it was later claimed that the library was burned by the Moslems who captured the city in 642 AD.

10 Noah's Ark

Sought after by generations of explorers on Mount Ararat, Turkey, where it has been variously identified as a hip-shaped rock formation or a blur glimpsed hundreds of feet under the ice. Unconfirmed sightings – obviously – come two-by-two.

11 Aristotle's second book of Poetics

"I will describe," wrote Aristotle in his introduction to the *Poetics*, "epic and tragic poetry, comedy too." We have the epic and the tragic, but where's the comic? Tragically, lost.

12 Raiders of the lost Ark of the Covenant

Yes, the very one Indiana Jones was looking for. It was, according to the Bible, an acacia wood chest 4ft x 2ft6ins x 2ft 6ins, covered in gold inside and out, and blazing with light and fire. Built on Moses' orders to contain the tablets bearing God's Law, the Ark was carried by the Israelites on their wanderings and in a battle. It stopped rivers

13 Fermat's misplaced mathematical theorem

In 1637 the great mathematician Pierre Fermat scribbled a note in his copy of Bachet's *Diophanti*. Next to the statement that $x^n + y^n = z^n$ has no solution where n is a natural number greater than 2, he wrote: "I have discovered a truly remarkable proof but this margin is too small to contain it." Fermat left no explanation but that cryptic note, thus launching the greatest treasure hunt in mathematical history. This spring, after three and a half centuries, the problem itself was finally solved when the mathematician Andrew Wiles offered a proof based on the latest work on elliptic curves.

14 The true cross

Sought after by generations of crusaders though it had already been found, according to legend, by St



The British Museum

'If this bad penny turns up it will be worth a mint'

Helena in 4th Century Jerusalem. The saint, mother of Constantine the Great, supposedly brought the relics back to her palace in Rome where they are now to be found in Sta Croce in Gerusalemme.

15 The missing Jewish billions in gold bullion

At today's values, an estimated £100bn of Nazi loot from occupied Europe is still unaccounted for, but not necessarily lost forever. What didn't get shipped away to South America could well be gathering

16 Venus de Milo's arms

Missing, presumably still somewhere beneath the Acropolis on the Greek island of Milos where the rest of her was exhumed in 1820.

17 King John's treasure

On 12 October 1215, wicked King John rode – presumably by some sort of causeway – across the estuary of the Wellstream where it flowed into the Wash on the border between Lincolnshire and Norfolk. His baggage train, hurrying to keep up, followed him into disaster, literally losing everything in the wash, as the quicksands and tides accounted for the nation's treasures.

Down into the mire went a vast quantity of treasure, jewels, gold and plate, including not only the king's coronation regalia but also his grandmother's regalia as Empress of Germany. The Wellstream estuary has long since been drained and reclaimed, so the king's treasure should now lie buried under the flat farmland somewhere along the line of the old stream between Wisbech and the Wash. Massive and costly excavations have been conducted to search for it – especially in the 1930s when thousands of acres were dug over, without success.

Whatever, it's all too late for King John, who died a week after the disaster, reportedly a broken man.

18 The lost Derby winner

The kidnapped 1981 Derby winner, Shergar, would be an old nag now. Last reported pushing up Irish daisies. But who knows?

19 Early Doctor Who

Many of the *Doctor Who* episodes starring William Hartnell and Patrick Troughton are still unaccounted for. They were lost between 1973 and 1977 when the BBC decided to clear its archives of 1960s back-and-white shows. The Doctor wasn't quite exterminated, though, for distraught Whovians have scoured the world for copies with remarkable success. In 1988,



AKG London

Fleeing from Sodom: the fire and brimstone are now under water



© BBC

Patrick Troughton in the 1966 "Dr Who and the Highlanders"



AKG London

17th Century copper engraving of the animals going in two-by-two

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About 1,000 BC King David took it to Jerusalem, where it was housed in the Holy of Holies in Solomon's Temple. But after that the Bible hardly mentions the Ark, and according to the Jewish scholar Abba Eban it seems to have been lost by the time of the Prophets—around 700 BC. Many a legend has sprung up around its fate. One is that Menelik, the son of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, took it to Ethiopia. That's the story pursued by Graham Hancock in his book *The Sign and the Seal*, which says the Ark is now guarded by an order of monks in Axum, Ethiopia.

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At today's values, an estimated £100bn of Nazi loot from occupied Europe is still unaccounted for, but not necessarily lost forever. What didn't get shipped away to South America could well be gathering interest in Swiss or Middle Eastern banks. In fact, as recently as September 1996 it was announced that bank accounts holding Adolf Hitler's royalties from *Mein Kampf* had been discovered secreted away in a Swiss bank by investigators on the trail of the Jewish billions.

To get some idea of the scale of pillaging, in 1983 workmen found 60 tonnes of gold bullion hidden in a monastery well in northern Italy—just half of what was seized by the Germans from the Rome Central Bank in 1944. The rest is still missing. And at least £50m worth of gold is said to have been hidden in Lake Toplitz in Austria by three Odessa officers who died before they could reveal the exact location.

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20 The missing penny

Just seven pennies were minted bearing the date 1933. These were issued in proof sets for ceremonial use by VIPs. Six are accounted for: three are in private hands, two in museums and one is under the foundation stone of a building in London. The seventh was also under a foundation stone—at the Church of St Cross in Leeds—until the stone was moved and the coin went missing, believed stolen, a few decades ago. If this bad penny turns up, it will be worth a mint. In 1994 one was sold for £25,300. ■

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